

Some Sophistic Positions Held by Xenophon's Socrates

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1. On yet another occasion Antiphon asked him how he supposed that he was making politicians of others when he himself avoided politics, if indeed he even understood the subject. “Well now, Antiphon,” he retorted, “could I play a more active role in politics by engaging on my own or by taking pains to turn out as many competent politicians as possible?” (*Mem.* 1.6.15 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson])
2. “[B]eing such men as I have indicated, is it to be supposed that these two wanted to adopt the simple life of Socrates, and with this object in view sought his society? Did they not rather think that by associating with him they would attain the utmost proficiency in speech and action (ἱκανωτάτω λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν)?” (*Mem.* 1.2.15 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson]).
3. “He was informed that Euthydemus, the handsome one, had formed a large collection of the works of celebrated poets and thinkers and therefore supposed himself to be a prodigy of wisdom for his age and was confident of surpassing all competitors in power of speech and action (τῷ δύνασθαι λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν).” (*Mem.* 4.2.1; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson])
4. [Socrates imitating Euthydemus] “Gentlemen of Athens, I have never yet learned anything from anyone, nor when I have been told of any man’s ability in speech and in action (λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν ἱκανούς) have I sought to meet him, nor have I taken the trouble to find a teacher among the men who know.” (*Mem.* 4.2.4; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson])
5. [Socrates] “How strange it is, he said, that those who want to play the harp or the pipes, or to ride or to get skill in any similar accomplishment, work hard at the art they mean to master, and not by themselves but under the tuition of the most eminent practitioners, doing and bearing anything in their anxiety to do nothing without their mentors’ guidance, simply because that is the only way to become proficient: and yet, among those who want to shine as speakers in the Assembly and as statesmen (τῶν δὲ βουλομένων δυνατῶν γενέσθαι λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν τὰ πολιτικά), there are some who think that they will be able to do so all of a sudden, by instinct, without training or study.” (*Mem.* 4.2.6; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson])
6. “Skill at speaking . . . practical efficiency (λεκτικὸς καὶ πρακτικὸς), and technical ingenuity were not the qualities that he was eager to foster in his companions. He held that they needed first to acquire moderation. For he considered that those abilities, unless accompanied by moderation, made their possessors more unjust and gave them greater means to do harm.” (*Mem.* 4.3.1 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson], modified)
7. [Protagoras] “What I teach is sound deliberation, both in domestic matters—how best to manage one’s household (τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικῶ), and in public affairs—how to realize one’s maximum potential for success in political debate and action (τὰ τῆς πόλεως δυνατώτατος ἂν εἶη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν).”

[Socrates] “Am I following what you are saying?” I asked. “You appear to be talking about the art of citizenship (τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην), and to be promising to make men good citizens.”

[Protagoras] “That is exactly what I claim, Socrates.” (*Prt.* 318e–319a; trans. Lombardo and Bell).

8. [Socrates] “Protagoras of Abdera, Prodicus of Ceos, and a great many others are able to convince anyone who associates with them in private that he wouldn't be able to manage his household or city (οὔτε οἰκίαν οὔτε πόλιν τὴν αὐτῶν διοικεῖν οἷοί τ' ἔσονται) unless they themselves supervise his education, and they are so intensely loved because of this wisdom of theirs that their disciples do everything but carry them around on their shoulders.” (*R.* X 600 c-d ; trans. Grube [rev. Reeve]).

9. [Socrates] “He has been telling me for some time, Anytus, that he longs to acquire that wisdom and virtue which enables men to manage their households and their cities well (ὅτι ἐπιθυμεῖ ταύτης τῆς σοφίας καὶ ἀρετῆς ἣ οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὰς τε οἰκίας καὶ τὰς πόλεις καλῶς διοικοῦσι).” (*Men.* 91a; trans. Grube).

10. “And they declare that those who neglect the necessities of life and admire the logical tricks of the ancient sophists do ‘philosophy,’ having disregarded those who learn and practice what allows them to manage well their own homes and the city's commonwealth (καὶ τὸν ἴδιον οἶκον καὶ τὰ κοινὰ τὰ τῆς πόλεως καλῶς διοικήσουσιν)—for which one must work hard, engage in philosophy, and do everything necessary” (Isocrates, *Antidosis* [XV] 285 ; trans. Too).

11. [Socrates] “But as for this activity, which is concerned with how a person might be as good as possible and manage his own house or his city in the best possible way (καὶ ἄριστα τὴν αὐτοῦ οἰκίαν διοικῶ ἢ πόλιν), it's considered shameful to refuse to give advice concerning it unless somebody pays you money (αἰσχρὸν νενόμισται μὴ φάναί συμβουλεύειν, ἔὰν μὴ τις αὐτῷ ἀργύριον διδῶ).” (*Grg.* 520e ; trans. Zeyl)

12. [Socrates] “But you know, no one will ever manage even his own household successfully (οὐδ' ἂν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ποτε οἶκον καλῶς τις οἰκήσειεν) unless he knows all its needs and sees that they are all supplied. Seeing that our city contains more than ten thousand houses, and it is difficult to look after so many families at once, you must have tried to make a start by doing something for one, I mean your uncle's? It needs it; and if you succeed with that one, you can set to work on a larger number. But if a man can't carry one talent, it's absurd for him to try to carry more than one, isn't it?” (*Mem.* 3.6.14 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson]).

13. “These excellent natures he recognized by their quickness to learn whatever subject they studied, their ability to remember what they learned, and their desire for every kind of knowledge that would allow them to manage their household and their city well (οἰκίαν τε καλῶς οἰκεῖν καὶ πόλιν) and, in general, to deal well with people and succeed in human affairs. For education would make men with such natures, not only happy in themselves and successful in the management of their households (τοὺς ἑαυτῶν οἴκους καλῶς οἰκεῖν), but also capable of conferring happiness on other people and on cities (καὶ πόλεις δύνασθαι εὐδαίμονας ποιεῖν).” (*Mem.* 4.1.2 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson], modified).

14. “[I]f any among his companions had evil desires, he openly tried to reform them and exhorted them to desire the fairest and noblest virtue, the one by means of which cities and households are managed well (τῆς δὲ καλλίστης καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεστάτης ἀρετῆς, ἣ πόλεις τε καὶ οἴκοι εὖ οἰκοῦσι, προτρέπων ἐπιθυμεῖν).” (*Mem.* 1.2.64 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson], modified).

15. Then Socrates exclaimed: "Surely, Euthydemus, you don't desire the kind of excellence that makes men good statesmen and managers (ταύτης τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐφίεσαι, δι' ἣν ἄνθρωποι πολιτικοὶ γίνονται καὶ οἰκονομικοὶ), competent rulers, and useful both to other people and to themselves?"

"Yes, I do, Socrates," answered Euthydemus, "that kind of excellence I greatly need."

"By Zeus," cried Socrates, "it's the noblest kind of excellence, the greatest of arts that you desire, for it belongs to kings and is dubbed 'regal' (τῆς καλλίστης ἀρετῆς καὶ μεγίστης ἐφίεσαι τέχνης· ἔστι γὰρ τῶν βασιλέων αὕτη καὶ καλεῖται βασιλική)." (*Mem.* 4.2.11 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson], modified).

16. [Socrates] "We had the idea that the statesman's art and the kingly art were the same (ἡ πολιτικὴ καὶ ἡ βασιλικὴ τέχνη ἢ αὐτὴ εἶναι)." (*Euthyd.* 291c; trans. Sprague)

17. [Aristippus] "Do you mean that the same things are both beautiful and ugly (καλὰ τε καὶ αἰσχροὶ τὰ αὐτὰ εἶναι)?

[Socrates] "Of course—and both good and bad (ἀγαθὰ τε καὶ κακὰ). For what is good for hunger is often bad for fever, and what is good for fever bad for hunger (πολλάκις γὰρ τὸ γε λιμοῦ ἀγαθὸν πυρετοῦ κακὸν ἔστι καὶ τὸ πυρετοῦ ἀγαθὸν λιμοῦ κακὸν ἔστι); what is beautiful for running is often ugly for wrestling, and what is beautiful for wrestling ugly for running (πολλάκις δὲ τὸ μὲν πρὸς δρόμον καλὸν πρὸς πάλην αἰσχρόν, τὸ δὲ πρὸς πάλην καλὸν πρὸς δρόμον αἰσχρόν). For all things are good and beautiful in relation to those purposes for which they are well adapted, bad and ugly in relation to those for which they are poorly adapted (πάντα γὰρ ἀγαθὰ μὲν καὶ καλὰ ἔστι πρὸς ἃ ἂν εὖ ἔχη, κακὰ δὲ καὶ αἰσχροὶ πρὸς ἃ ἂν κακῶς)." (*Mem.* 3.8.6-7; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson]).

18. "Now to seek the good (τάγαθόν), Euthydemus, is this the way?"

"What do you mean?"

"Does it seem to you that the same thing is useful to everyone (τὸ αὐτὸ πᾶσιν ὠφέλιμον)?"

"No."

"In fact, what is useful to one may sometimes be harmful to another, don't you think (Τὸ ἄλλω ὠφέλιμον οὐ δοκεῖ σοι ἐνίοτε ἄλλω βλαβερόν εἶναι)?"

"Assuredly."

"Would you call anything good except what is useful (Ἄλλο δ' ἂν τι φαίης ἀγαθὸν εἶναι ἢ τὸ ὠφέλιμον)?

"No."

"Consequently what is useful is good for someone to whom it is useful?"

"I think so."

"Consider the beautiful: can we define it in any other way? Or is it possible to name a beautiful body, for instance, or vessel, or anything else that you know to be beautiful for all purposes (πρὸς πάντα καλὸν εἶναι)?"

"Of course not."

"Then does the beauty in using anything consist in using it for just that purpose for which that particular thing is useful?"

"Certainly."

"And is a thing beautiful for any other purpose than that for which it is beautiful to use that particular thing?"

"For no other purpose whatever."

"The useful, then, is beautiful for any purpose for which it is useful." (*Mem.* 4.6.8-9 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson], modified).

19. [Protagoras] “I know of many things that are disadvantageous (ἀνωφελῆ) to humans, foods and drinks and drugs and many other things, and some that are advantageous (ὠφέλιμα); some that are neither to humans but one or the other to horses; some that are advantageous only to cattle; some only to dogs; some that are advantageous to none of these but are so to trees; some that are good for the roots of a tree (ταῖς μὲν ρίζαις ἀγαθά), but bad for its shoots, such as manure, which is good spread on the roots of any plant (ταῖς μὲν ρίζαις ἀγαθόν) but absolutely ruinous if applied to the new stems and branches. Or take olive oil, which is extremely bad for all plants and is the worst enemy of the hair of all animals except humans, for whose hair it is beneficial, as it is for the rest of their bodies. But the good is such a multifaceted and variable thing (οὕτω δὲ ποικίλον τί ἐστὶν τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ παντοδαπὸν) that, in the case of oil, it is good (ἀγαθόν) for the external parts of the human body but very bad for the internal parts, which is why doctors universally forbid their sick patients to use oil in their diets except for the least bit, just enough to dispel a prepared meal's unappetizing aroma.” (*Prt.* 334a-c; trans. Lombardo and Bell).

20. When asked again whether courage could be taught or came naturally (διδασκτὸν ἢ φυσικόν), he replied: “I think that just as one man's body is naturally stronger than another's for labor, so one man's soul is naturally (φύσει) braver than another's in danger. For I notice that men brought up under the same laws and customs differ widely in daring. Nevertheless, I think that every man's nature acquires more courage by learning and practice (Νομίζω μέντοι πᾶσαν φύσιν μαθήσει καὶ μελέτη πρὸς ἀνδρείαν ἀύξεσθαι). Of course, Scythians and Thracians would not dare to take bronze shields and spears and fight Spartans: and of course, Spartans would not be willing to face Thracians with leather shields and javelins, nor Scythians with bows for weapons. And similarly in all other points, I find that human beings naturally (φύσει) differ one from another and greatly improve by application (ἐπιμελεία πολὺ ἐπιδιδόντας). Hence it is clear that all men, whatever their natural gifts, the talented and the dullards alike (καὶ τοὺς εὐφουεστέρους καὶ τοὺς ἀμβλυτέρους τὴν φύσιν), must learn and practice (καὶ μαθάνειν καὶ μελετᾶν) what they want to excel in.” (*Mem.* 3.9.1-3 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson]).

21. “[T]ell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught (ἄρα διδασκτὸν ἡ ἀρετή)? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice (ἀσκητόν), or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature (φύσει) or in some other way (ἢ ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπῳ)?” (*Men.* 70a; trans. Grube).

22. [Socrates] Next a circular frame was brought in, closely set around with upright sword-blades, and the dancer turned somersaults into this and out again over the blades, so that the spectators were afraid that she would hurt herself; but she went through her performance confidently and safely. Socrates hailed Antisthenes and said, “I don't imagine that the witnesses of this act will continue to deny that courage is a thing that can be taught (ἡ ἀνδρεία διδασκτὸν), when this girl in spite of her sex throws herself so daringly over the swords.” (*Smp.* 2.11-12 ; trans. Tredennick [rev. Waterfield]).

23. At the first visit, one of them asked, “Was it by constantly being with some wise man or by natural ability (διὰ συνουσίαν τινός τῶν σοφῶν ἢ φύσει) that Themistocles stood out among his fellow citizens as the man to whom the city naturally looked when it felt the want of a great leader?”

In order to set Euthydemus thinking, Socrates said: “If in the minor arts great achievement is impossible without competent masters, surely it is absurd to imagine that the art of statesmanship, the greatest of all accomplishments, comes to a man of its own accord (ἀπὸ ταύτομάτου).” (*Mem.* 4.2.2 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson]).

24. “How strange it is, [Socrates] said, “that those who want to play the harp or the pipes, or to ride or to acquire skill in any similar accomplishment, work hard at the art they mean to master, and

not by themselves, but under the supervision of the most eminent practitioners, doing and bearing anything in their anxiety to do nothing without their expert's guidance, simply because that is the only way to become proficient. And yet, among those who want to become capable of speaking in the Assembly and acting as statesmen (τῶν δὲ βουλομένων δυνατῶν γενέσθαι λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν τὰ πολιτικὰ), there are some who think that they will be able to do so all of a sudden, on their own (αὐτόματοι ἐξαίφνης δυνατοὶ ταῦτα ποιεῖν ἔσεσθαι), without preparation or application (ἄνευ παρασκευῆς καὶ ἐπιμελείας). Yet surely these arts are much harder to learn; for many more are interested in them and few succeed. Clearly then these arts demand longer and more intense application (ἐπιμελείας δέονται πλείονος καὶ ἰσχυροτέρας) than the others." (*Mem.* 4.2.6-7 ; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson], modified).

25. "To me indeed it seems that whatever is honorable, whatever is good in conduct is the result of training, and that is especially true of self-control (Πάντα μὲν οὖν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ τὰ καλὰ καὶ τάγαθὰ ἀσκητὰ εἶναι, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ σωφροσύνη.)." (*Mem.* 1.2.23; trans. Marchant [rev. Henderson]).

26. "For myself, I have described him as he was: . . . so wise (φρόνιμος) that he was unerring in his judgement of the better and the worse and needed no counsellor (μηδὲ ἄλλου προσδέεσθαι), but relied on himself for his knowledge of such matters (ἀλλ' αὐταρκῆς εἶναι πρὸς τὴν τούτων γνῶσιν) and was capable of expounding and defining them (ικανὸς δὲ καὶ λόγῳ εἰπεῖν τε καὶ διορίσασθαι τὰ τοιαῦτα)." (*Mem.* 4.8.11 ; trans. Marchant and Henderson, modified).

27. [Socrates] "Let us begin, then, by coming to grips with the doctrine at the same point as before. Let us see whether or not our discontent was justified, when we criticized it as making each individual self-sufficient in wisdom (ὅτι αὐτάρκη ἕκαστον εἰς φρόνησιν ἐποίηι). Protagoras then conceded that some people were superior to others in the matter of what is better or worse, and these, he said, were wise. Didn't he?" (*Tht.* 169d ; trans. Cornford).

28. "Be not angry with your father, Tigranes, for putting me to death; for he does it, not from any spirit of malice, but from ignorance(οὐ γὰρ κακονοία τινὶ τοῦτο ποιεῖ, ἀλλ' ἀγνοία), and when men do wrong from ignorance, I believe they do it quite against their will (ὀπόσα δὲ ἀγνοία ἄνθρωποι ἐξαμαρτάνουσι, πάντ' ἀκούσια ταῦτ' ἔγωγε νομίζω)." (*Cyr.* 3.1.38; trans. Miller)